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A REPLY

TO

DR. JOHN VAN BIBBER

ON

“THE FUTURE INFLUENCE OF THE JOHNS
HOPKINS HOSPITAL ON THE MEDICAL
PROFESSION OF BALTIMORE.”

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BALTIMORE, *August, 1879.*

Editor of the Southern Clinic.

DEAR SIR: At the last meeting of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland, Dr. John Van Bibber, of Baltimore, read a paper whose title we have given above, and which that body, very properly we think, twice refused to print in its transactions; whereupon Dr. J. Van Bibber printed and published it at his own expense, and, as appears, sent copies of it to the secular press of this and possibly of other cities. The *Sun*, a daily paper published in Baltimore, received a copy, and in its issue of July 18th prints an extensive notice of the paper, in which most of the statements that were so objectionable to the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty are reproduced, apparently with entire approval and evidently with great glee.

It would probably be a useless task to undertake to show the *Sun* writer that he was entirely in error in attributing to the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty the motive for refusing to reprint this paper—that its strictures were “unpalatable”—but rather that they were *untrue*; and he would doubtless feel grossly insulted if we told him that he did not

understand what he was writing about. But it is well known to every medical man that the ignorance evinced by the editors of the secular press of all medical matters is absolutely phenomenal. And yet it seems there is not one of them, from the editor of the New York *Herald* down to him of the smallest village *thumb-paper*, who does not seem to think himself competent to instruct the ablest professor in the world how best both to teach and practice medicine.

“All other callings are by calm behest
Resigned to those who understand them best;
But every wordy theoretic leech
Can tell the teacher how he ought to teach.”

We shall therefore leave the editor of the *Sun* to the enjoyment of his sublime self-complacency.

But as Dr. Van Bibber's paper contains several propositions which we think questionable, a brief discussion of them in the *Clinic* seems to us neither “unwise” nor “unnecessary.” In this paper Dr. John Van Bibber has undertaken the ungrateful task of belittling his native city and depreciating the culture and enterprise of his profession by asserting (for he offers no proof) that “Up to this time we have had no general hospital in Baltimore. Unfortunately a few small institutions of limited means and circumscribed usefulness have proved our poverty in this regard,” etc. That the state of the medical profession in this city is “in almost the same condition as we might expect to find the profession of a much more obscure and less populous community. It derives little or no advantage from the institutions that should exist in a city of 400,000 inhabitants.” That “having no centre of observation and research, the literary efforts of medical men here have been meagre, scanty, and unimportant.” That “during the last fifteen years the standard of medicine here has even descended lower. About that time, by a certain combination of circumstances, the ranks of the profession suddenly received great accessions, partly from strangers selecting this city as their home, and in great part by the unwise and unnecessary establishment of two new

medical schools without an effort on the part of any of them to raise the standard of education. The rivalry to attract students, added to the general laxity of examinations (a worse abuse), the establishment by certain schools of a beneficiary system unguarded by any requirements. By the working of this questionable system any person, because he was a man and wanted to be a doctor, *however uneducated and unworthy he might be, was launched upon the community to assume all the privileges of a practising physician,*" etc. (Italics our own.)

Now, these are all grave charges; and if true, no able, cultivated and ambitious member of the profession will ever think of selecting this city as the field of his labors, and no medical student who desires to obtain a thorough medical education will select one of our medical colleges for his *alma mater*. Let us see if they are true!

That Baltimore has no *great* hospital, covering acres of ground like some of those in Europe, and such as the Johns Hopkins Hospital promises to be, is undoubtedly true; and we think the people of Baltimore are to be congratulated that it is true; for all experience heretofore has proven that the larger the hospital and the greater the aggregation of patients in them, the greater has been the death rate in them. So well established has this fact become, and so completely admitted, that the subject of "Hospitalism" has formed the theme of discussion for the ablest members of the profession in Europe; and for the last twenty-five years a very considerable portion of the medical literature of those countries has had this fact for its subject. But that "up to this time Baltimore has had no general hospital" we deny. For more than forty years we have had one, and for more than ten years two general hospitals connected with our schools of medicine. These are small, it is true, compared to the great hospitals of Vienna, Paris, or London; but they are probably as well equipped and supplied as any in the world, and up to this time at least have been sufficient for the needs of our city, whose population, by the way, is pro-

bably nearer 300,000 than 400,000, as Dr. Van Bibber asserts. In addition to these there are numerous hospitals—general and special—in this city under sectarian control; so that Baltimore is probably as well supplied with hospitals as any city in the United States of equal population.

That our alms-house, as Dr. Van Bibber asserts, “which in other cities would constitute an important element in medical education, is here rendered useless by the constant changes of municipal preferment, and the inaction of political trustees,” is to a certain extent true. But we submit that an alms-house was never intended to be—nor should it ever be made—a hospital for the treatment of acute diseases. Besides, the remoteness of the Baltimore city alms-house from the populous centre of the city will always prevent its extensive use as a hospital, and can never be made “an important element of medical education,” on account of its inaccessibility.

What that state of the medical profession may be which “we might expect to find in a much more obscure and less populous city” than Baltimore, we confess that we do not clearly apprehend; but when Dr. John Van Bibber asserts that “the literary efforts of medical men here have been meagre, scanty, and unimportant,” he only shows his want of knowledge of the current medical literature of the last ten or fifteen years. It is true that no medical man in Baltimore has laboriously collected, translated and collated the results of other people’s labors and published them as their own, as has been done in some other American cities; but this I think is rather a matter of congratulation, not reprobation. But if Dr. Van Bibber has read the medical journals faithfully during the period I have mentioned, he must have seen many valuable contributions to medical literature in almost all departments of medical science by Baltimore physicians. The city of Baltimore certainly has as many flourishing societies as any other city in the country of equal population; and that “two new medical schools” should have been established within the period mentioned

certainly testifies to the energy, industry, ambition and culture of the physicians of Baltimore—qualities which Dr. Van Bibber seems to deny them entirely.

But was the establishment of these two new schools unwise or unnecessary? At the end of the war, in 1865, the whole country, and the southern states particularly, had lost many of their best physicians. Some had found honorable graves upon battle fields; many had succumbed to disease contracted in the line of duty in camp, field and hospital; while others had retired in the natural order of things from age and growing infirmities. In the mean time the ordinary supply of new physicians had been completely cut off in the south, by the closure of all the southern colleges for four years; and partially also in the north by the diversion of young men to the army, and to more lucrative pursuits opened to them by the “ephemeral and fictitious financial prosperity engendered by the war.”

In the south, large communities were sometimes left without a doctor; and it is well known that in many instances, hospital stewards and nurses who showed some aptitude for surgery, were appointed by the Confederate government as assistant surgeons in the army.

In consequence of this state of facts, when the war ended there was an extraordinary rush to the various medical colleges. In some of the schools north of us, there were assembled classes of more than six hundred students; and the impossibility of affording such numbers any really valuable clinical instruction in the practical art of medicine, must be apparent to any thoughtful medical man. Under these circumstances, we think the establishment of two new schools here, by whose exertions large numbers of western and southern men were attracted to Baltimore instead of to Philadelphia and New York, and by which the classes in the schools of those cities were reduced to something like manageable numbers, was neither “unwise” nor “unnecessary.”

A reduction of the rather exorbitant fees for college instruction to the young men of the south, who had been

financially ruined by the results of the war, by granting them special terms, was certainly *not* a "questionable" procedure, but one perfectly just, humane, and beneficent. But that "by the working of this questionable system, any person, because he was a man and wanted to be a doctor, however uneducated and unworthy he might be, was launched upon the community to assume all the privileges of a practising physician" we believe to be totally untrue. We do not believe that one single person has studied medicine because of the establishment of the two new schools in Baltimore, who would not have done so under any circumstances; nor do we believe that any one has passed through either of these schools who could not, and would not, have passed successfully through the older schools.

But the gravest of Dr. Van Bibber's charges is "that the standard of medicine here has descended even still lower," partly in consequence of the great number of "strangers selecting this city as their home," but more especially on account of the "unwise and unnecessary establishment" of these two unfortunate new schools. Let us examine this charge and see if there is any truth in it.

The last number of the Maryland Medical Journal contains a communication presumably from a member of the Faculty of the University of Maryland, in which it is stated that in that school—

"Fifteen years ago, there was a corps of six professors, and a demonstrator of anatomy; the branches taught were: I. Surgery; II. Chemistry; III. Practice of Medicine; IV. Obstetrics, and Diseases of Women and Children; V. Anatomy and Physiology, and VI. Meteria Medica and Therapeutics.

Clinical Medicine and Surgery were taught practically at the Infirmary adjacent to the medical college, by the respective professors, who gave two clinics on medicine and two on surgery every week during the winter session. Very few medical schools then had equal advantages for clinical instruction.

Now let any one examine the circular of the present day, and he will find a corps of eleven regular professors, with a

demonstrator of anatomy, an assistant demonstrator, and three prosectors.

He will find the following branches taught: I. Chemistry; II. Obstetrics; III. Practice of Medicine; IV. Surgery; V. Materia Medica and Therapeutics; VI. Physiology and Hygiene; VII. Diseases of Women and Children; VIII. Ophthalmic and Aural Surgery; IX. Anatomy; X. Operative Surgery; XI. Dermatology. The professors, moreover, give special clinical courses on diseases of throat and chest, and on diseases of the nervous system. Nearly all give clinical instruction at the hospital, not only daily during the session, but during the entire year."

And more to the same purpose.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons has ten professors (it had twelve at one time), and the Washington University, now defunct (as the editor of "the Sun" does *not* seem to know), had ten or twelve while in existence.

The enlargement of the number of professors, and the selection of gentlemen who had proved themselves specially qualified to teach the branches of medical science assigned to them, and thus securing more thorough and exact teaching while facilitating the labors of the student in acquiring knowledge; the establishment of a hospital for the practical teaching of obstetrics,—something entirely unknown before in the South, and as is believed, in the United States; a hospital for the treatment of surgical diseases of women, where students are taught practically how to treat them; the establishment of an out-door clinic in connection with each of the hospitals, and a dispensary, at which more than 30,000 patients are treated annually; special instruction in the treatment of diseases of the chest, throat, and eye and ear; the use of the laryngoscope and microscope in medicine; these are some of the improvements in medical teaching adopted during these fifteen pernicious years in which the "standard of medicine here has descended even lower," improvements in which the College of Physicians and Surgeons has led the way, and virtually forced upon both the old school and the new.

It is with some diffidence that we offer our opinions and assertions in opposition to those of Dr. John Van Bibber

who was himself "launched upon the community to assume all the privileges of a practising physician" during this dark period in the history of medical education in Baltimore; who has also given his personal and professional countenance to the "questionable" system he denounces, by accepting a lectureship in one of those "new schools" which, according to his observation, did *not* make "an effort to raise the standard of education," and who ought therefore to know of what he speaks.

But the writer has also been engaged in teaching in one of the new-schools for the last seven years, and while he has seen none of the evils which Dr. John Van Bibber denounces and deplores, he *has* seen all the improvements and advances heretofore enumerated; and can say with absolute truth upon his personal knowledge, that the final examinations have been made more searching and exacting from year to year, as these new and improved facilities for study have been afforded to medical students; and as is proved by the large and constantly increasing number of "rejections" by the school with which he is connected.

Dr. Van Bibber's sneer at the "strangers who have selected Baltimore as their home" is as unjust and untrue as it is ungenerous. What is the true history of the Medical profession in Baltimore since 1864?

The number and activity of its Medical societies is always, and justly, taken as a measure of the culture of any Medical community. If the recollection of this callow young doctor could extend back so far, he would know that, in 1864 there was *one* Medical Society in Baltimore, the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty, which dragged along a precarious existence, sometimes not meeting for years, occasionally publishing a slim pamphlet, which contained little else than the minutes of its business sessions; while now that faculty is large in membership, flourishing in finances, active in scientific work; has established a valuable medical library, which is rapidly growing, and publishes every year a volume of transactions that is a credit to the profession of the

city and state. During the period mentioned by Dr. Van Bibber eight new Medical Societies have been established, six of which are now in a flourishing existence. The "strangers" whom Dr. Van Bibber denounces have taken a leading and active part in the formation and sustentation of nearly every one of these societies; and a number of these "strangers" may be found in the faculties of both the schools, who are believed to be as talented, as honorable and honored, as any of those "to the manor born."

Dr. John Van Bibber ought to know, since he assumes specially to treat diseases of the mind and nervous system, and must therefore study the causes and motives of human action, that when civil commotion is attended by great social disaster, the weak and unworthy "despair and die," or sink under the depressing and degrading influences which assail them; while the brave, the strong and good, fight against evil fortune as long as battle can be waged successfully. When this can no longer be done, they try to elude fortune by emigrating.

The profession in Baltimore have received no detriment from "the strangers who have selected this city as their home."

AGRESTIS.

